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AFFORDANCES FOR EMPOWERMENT: A PEDAGOGICAL, ANALYTICAL AND HEURISTIC TOOL FOR TEXTUAL AND DISCOURSAL *UNCLOAKING*

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1. INTRODUCTION

Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) is a study of "language as a form of social practice" (Fairclough, 1989: 20). It is premised on the notion that there is unequal access to linguistic and social resources, and that these resources are linked and are controlled at an institutional level. It offers a perspective that language and social reality are related and challenges the argument that language is a neutral reflection of society and social reality. Rather it argues that language, instead of drawing meanings passively from pre-existing knowledge of the world, plays an active role in classifying the phenomena and experiences through which individuals construct, understand and represent reality. As Fairclough notes "language connects with the social through being the primary domain of ideology, and through being both a site of, and a stake in, struggles for power" (Fairclough, 1989: 15). The relationship between language, power and society is central to CDA concerns. Language constructs and is constructed by society. If language is invested with power relationships, then an understanding of power is central to an understanding of language use, particularly in the way in which the control of this shaping power can be used as a tool for influence and authority. Of particular relevance here is the process of *naturalisation* (Fairclough, 1989) in which language acts as a social control agent, through which members of society are conditioned to accept conventions and practices that may not be in their best interests, these (language) practices and conventions being represented as *common-sense*, inevitable and beyond challenge.

A key element of social control is the education system. Links between educational systems and power have been highlighted by Bourdieu & Passeron (1990) in their critique of cultural and social reproduction, whereby inequalities and elites are replicated from generation to generation. They

argue that educational institutions operate to reproduce class relations, reflect and reproduce hierarchies of knowledge and so the interests of dominant social forces. Along similar lines, their contemporary Foucault (1972) has contended that: "every educational system is a political means of maintaining or modifying the appropriation of discourse, with the knowledge and power it carries with it" (Foucault, 1972: 227).

In this paper, then, I will argue that the *appropriation of discourse* is a valid educational aim for those wishing to promote and support a social justice agenda. My aim will be to emphasise the value of being able to *unpack* various texts/genres/discourses as a tool to understanding how language is employed to make meanings, and specifically how this can be introduced into these secondary education contexts. Through such critical understanding, the aim is to help learners make representations, agendas and positionalities more lucid, and to be aware of the opaqueness and provisionality of language use. In Morgan's (1997: 59) terms, it seeks to enhance opportunities for *empowerment through appropriation*.

In education, texts are one of the central tools of our trade. Yet there is evidence that we still fail to address these texts critically in many instances. For example, Grady (1997) offers a critique of how textbooks can operate to perpetuate the economic social and political status quo that privileges certain groups over others. There has been a long and valuable history of critical literacy theorisation and practical classroom application, particularly in the Australian context. Whilst there have been differing varieties of, and developments in, critical literacy (Shor, 1992; Morgan, 1997; Luke & Freebody, 1997, and Janks, 2002), all share a concern with the inter-relationships between language, power, and social practices. The classroom potential for these concerns to be aired has received extensive treatment in the Australian context (Morgan, 1997 and Luke *et alii,* 1994). In this paper I seek to complement such articulations thorough the presentation of a pedagogical, analytical and heuristic tool for the critical analysis of texts and discourses, the Critical Literacy Frame.

A key aim of this tool, as generally with critical approaches to language teaching, resides in attempts to uncover the process of *naturalisation* in any discourse, and through the problematization of the accepted conventions and practices, seek to show how meaning, "(…) because it is socially constructed, can be deconstructed and reconstructed" (McKenzie, 1992: 226). As Fairclough (1992: 9) notes then, "dominant practices and conventions may be confronted with alternative and oppositional ones, with different valuations of languages and varieties, or different ideological investments". This move to a more critical notion of pedagogy, then, is the principal aim of such textual and discoursal *uncloaking* of language.

2. THE CRITICAL LITERACY FRAME

It is the intention of this article to provide a practical classroom tool, and so I have opted for a set of criteria that will allow learners and teachers to look at elements of the text at both a *micro* lexico-grammatical level, as well as consider the impact of such choices at more *macro* semantic and societal levels. The work is largely grounded in my own research on this area (Hyatt, 2003), which itself was informed by key work in the field of Critical Discourse Analysis (Fairclough, 1995*a*) and Critical Literacy (Luke & Freebody, 1997). The Frame can be represented in tabular form as below:

TABLE 1. *The Critical Literacy Frame*

1. Pronouns
2. Passive / Active Forms
3. Time – Tense and Aspect
4. Adjectives, Adverbs, Nouns, Verbal Processes – Evaluation and Semantic Prosody
5. Metaphor
6. Presupposition / Implication
7. Medium
8. Audience
9. Visual Images
10. Age, Class, Disability, Gender, Race / Ethnicity and Sexuality Issues
11. Reference to other texts, genres, discourse and individuals

The criteria are not meant to be fixed entities and teachers and learners could and should supplement or modify these criteria according to their contexts, the context of the text(s) under examination and the needs and interests of the learners. In this paper however, I seek to concentrate on these criteria in terms of their analytical applications rather than pedagogic affordances, though the latter are clearly central to my concerns and are more fully illustrated in other related papers (Hyatt 2005 and 2006 forthcoming).

2.1. *Pronouns*

This aspect of the Critical Literacy Frame considers the way in which pronouns are used in the text, whether they are inclusive (*our*, *us*, *we*, etc.) or exclusive (*they*, *their*, *them*, *he*, *she*, *it*, *you*, *your*, etc.). It also considers how the reader and other participants are positioned as allies or in-group members with the author, thus assuming shared knowledge, beliefs and values, or how

readers and other participants are marginalised as *outsiders* with different beliefs and agendas. Pronouns are central to the way individuals and groups are named and so are always political in the way they inscribe power relations.

Further detailed analysis of the use of pronouns (including *I*, *we*, *they*, *it* and *one*) to evoke certain constructions can be found in Pennycook (1994) and Hyatt (2003). It is important to note that I am not suggesting that the use of such pronouns is inevitably sinister in intention but can in certain contexts serve as part of a construction that reinforces particular agendas and positions.

2.2. *Activisation/Passivisation*

Transformations of active constructions into passive forms can be motivated by the desire to elide agency and therefore systematically background responsibility for actions in some instances or to foreground responsibility in others. The manipulation of agency transparency serves to construct a world of various responsibilities, and power, e.g. *the present perfect is used to…* By removing the agent, the use of a particular grammatical form is given an unquestionable, universal function, in spite of its context of use and the political dimensions I am raising here. Such an analysis is almost always absent from textbooks and grammar reference books using such definitions.

I feel, however, that it is important to note that to assume that such a basic transitivity shift as passivisation or activisation would lead to a complete shift in the understanding of the reader would be an over-simplification and patronising to the reader. However, as noted earlier, the construction is effected thorough a layering of strata of representations and the claim for relevance of this aspect of the Critical Literacy Frame is as one of these myriad strata.

2.3. *Time, Tense and Aspect*

This relates to the way in which tense and aspect are used to construct *understanding* about events. For example, the use of the present simple tense constructs an event as reality or fact; the use of the present perfect simple constructs a past event as being of relevance at the moment; the past simple tense can represent a past event as no longer being important or relevant. The effect of tense choices can be demonstrated by converting the past simple tenses to present perfect and vice versa and noting the different semantic effects.

It is therefore important to understand that choices made in terms of tense and aspect are not merely concerned with the time frame of an action or process but also impact clearly on the representation of that action or process as true, relevant or significant.

2.4. *Adjectives, adverbs, nouns and verbal processes. Evaluation and semantic prosody*

2.4.1. Adjectives, adverbs, nouns and verbal processes

The use of loaded, dramatic, and stereotyping adjectives, adverbs and nouns are central to the construction of an event or a person, whether or not that construction is evaluating its object positively or negatively. Also the use of non-hedged adverbs, such as *surely*, *obviously*, *clearly* and so on, position a contention as being incontrovertible *fact*.

The concept of evaluation is useful here. Hunston & Thompson (2000: 5) define evaluation as "the broad cover term for the expression of the speaker or writer's attitude or stance towards, viewpoint on, or feelings about the entities or propositions that he or she is talking about". Evaluation can further be divided into two main categories, *inscribed* and *evoked* (Martin, 2000). In the *inscribed* category the evaluation is carried by a specific lexical item, overtly displaying the attitudinal judgement of the text producer e.g. *excellent*, *terrible*, etc.

In addition to *inscribed* evaluation, it is also important to consider what Martin terms *evoked* evaluation. This type of evaluation uses superficially neutral ideational choices but which have the potential to evoke judgmental responses, in those who share a particular set of ideological values. These evoked evaluations, in themselves do not denote the text producer's attitude to the content overtly, but leave the value judgement to the reader/listener. However, they are mechanisms through which evaluation is covertly constructed. For example, in food promotional text terms such as *natural* and *organic* operate in a similar way. Negative evaluation can also be constructed by terms such as *suspected asylum seeker*. Such mechanisms can be seen as powerful devices in a hegemonic view of language construction in the role they play in projecting a notion of *common sense*.

2.4.2. Semantic Prosody

For Hunston & Francis (2000: 137), "a word may be said to have a particular semantic prosody if it can be shown to co-occur typically with other words that belong to a particular semantic set". These semantic sets are often positive or negative. For example, Stubbs (1995) illustrated that more

than 90% of the words collocating with the word *cause* were negative, e.g. *accident, cancer, commotion, crisis* and *delay*. Stubbs also gives an example of positive semantic prosody, *provide*, which has amongst its typical collocates words such as *care, food, help, jobs, relief* and *support*. A powerful illustrative example of these differences comes if one collocates both *provide* and *cause* with the word *work*, and the outcome is clearly one of positive associations with the former and negative associations with the latter.

2.5. *Metaphor*

Metaphor is more than just a literary device –it plays a fundamental part in the way people represent social reality. The use of metaphor is central in the way it positions what is described and the reader's relationship to this. It is also important to realise that the metaphor and its alternative congruent or literal form do not express exactly the same meaning –indeed the purpose of metaphor is functional in that it serves to construe a differently foregrounded meaning than its alternatives. Metaphors are neither better nor worse than their congruent counterparts, they are simply performing different functions. It is significant to note that metaphors need not only be lexical but can be grammatical as well (Halliday, 1985: 319-345), whereby the meaning is expressed "through a lexico-grammatical form which originally evolved to express a different kind of meaning" (Thompson, 1996: 165).

2.6. *Presupposition/Implication*

Presuppositions help to represent constructions as convincing realities and there are a number of lexico-grammatical means by which this can be achieved:

1) the use of negative questions and tags which presuppose a certain answer –*isn't it the case that…?, wouldn't it be fair to say that…?*;
2) the use of factive verbs, adjectives and adverbs, verbs that presuppose their grammatical complements, adjectives and adverbs that describe entities and processes they presuppose, and therefore represent them as facts –we now *know*…, we *realize*…, as you will be *aware*…, *odd*…, *obvious*…, *previously*… and so on. Factive verbs have been noted in Hoey (2000) as a form of embedded evaluation;
3) the use of change of state verbs which presuppose the factuality of a previous state their policy on school-meals has *changed*…, this school has *improved*…; *transform*, *turn into*, *become,* and so on;

4) the use of invalid causal links presupposing that if one fact is true then the next is also true: *90% of my class passed FCE this year, 80% of my class passed last year, therefore my teaching is getting better…*;
5) rhetorical questions, which pre-suppose the answer implied by the questioner e.g. *Isn't this obvious?,* or provide the questioner with the opportunity to answer their own question, the question they have framed and therefore presuppose the self-response as *true*: *–Isn't this obvious? Of course it is*.

2.7. *Medium*

The conversationalizing of a text is a form of interdiscursivity, which goes beyond the ways in which texts borrow from, steal from and interpenetrate each other, to the ways in which genres and discourses do this. Examples of interdiscursivity can be seen in the way in which the discourse of business has penetrated the discourse of higher education (Fairclough, 1993), with the perception of students being addressed more explicitly as customers and the attendant implications of this managerialist discourse –value for money and accountability being positively associated with this change, and the changing perception of teachers as being in need of scrutiny (Smyth, 1995 and Hargreaves, 1994) being the negative aspect. Typical characteristics of the medium of spoken discourse include:

1) the use of a narrative present tense: this tense usage suggests the narrative progression that is often associated with day-to-day conversations;
2) representation of the talk of others, including the interlocutor: this is a technique for offering an antagonistic proposition without direct face-risk to the propositioner. It is also a feature in the simulation of the voice of others, again representing the *talk* as a conversation;
3) the use of present continuous with narrative, verbal processes: as discussed in Carter & McCarthy (1995) this is a grammatical feature of spoken discourse, and can be used to emphasise the act of saying, as opposed to the substantive content of what is being said. Logically, therefore it is a feature of spoken discourse;
4) the use of discourse markers in conversational language: again there are myriad examples of functional discourse markers, such as *so, anyway, I mean…, Well, OK,* etc. which also contribute to the reading of these exchanges as spoken discourse.

2.8. *Audience*

Central to the notion of language as a social semiotic is the idea that language is utilized for some form of communication, and therefore a party or parties at whom communication is aimed, in other words, the audience. Any analysis would therefore be inadequate if it did not focus some attention on who is perceived as being the audience, and how they are projected in terms of social distance –relationship to and familiarity with the text producer– and status. In light of the fact that there is no way that the author can know exactly who the audience is, the notion of audience can be read as an idealised, projected construction. In this idealisation and projection, clues can be found as to the ideological presuppositions of the text producers.

2.9. *Visual Images*

Significant work in these visual and multi-modal areas has been conducted by Barthes (1973), Kress & Leeuwen (1996 and 2001). Historically, the association of the camera recording *a set image* and as such being associated with *truth* and *objectivity* has impacted on the way visual images are read. Despite the potential for the manipulation of images, and the potential for displaying an image with a constructed impression of its contextual setting, visual images do play a powerful role in the construction of truth and reality. In this respect there are clear relationships with notions of hegemony in presenting a picture of *this is how it is*. As Fairclough notes (1995*b*: 7) images have primacy over words.

2.10. *Age, Class, Disability, Gender, Race/Ethnicity and Sexuality Issues*

This section is premised on concerns to avoid essentialism, a philosophy that ascribes fixed properties, qualities, and/or abilities to various categories and groups of people e.g. women are not assertive because they are women, Asian students are passive because they are Asian, black people are good at sport because they are black, etc. The basic principles of stereotyping any cultural group are rooted in essentialist thinking. The alternative to this is social constructionism which emphasises the role of social learning in acquiring supposedly *essential* characteristics –this position was summed up by Simone de Beauvoir's (1953) statement "one is not born a women; one becomes one". Within a text it can be revealing to note any comment regarding individuals who may be projected as less socially valued, as a result of these issues, in order to legitimize the assertions of those who hold power, or to identify any pejorative or stereotyping presentation or labelling of such people as being a *normal*, naturalised and commonly-shared

viewpoint. Whilst such concerns are central to any approach concern with the relationships of language to power, I feel it is justified in directing teachers and learners to consider the impact these issues have on marginalised groups.

2.11. *Reference to other texts, genres, discourses and individuals*

One consistent way it which texts from all genres seek to establish the legitimacy of their claims, their common-sense assumptions and their world views is through reference to other texts, genres, discourses and individuals. Fairclough (1992) offers the terms interdiscursivity (or constitutive intertextuality) for the wider appropriation of styles, genres and the ideological assumptions underpinning discursive practice. Interdiscursivity operates on a more macro level than intertextuality and refers to the diverse ways in which genres and discourses interpenetrate each other, as exemplified previously with the examples of the co-penetration of the discourses of advertising, science and medicine, and the discourses of academia and consumerism (Fairclough, 1993). Intertextuality is perhaps better viewed as the identifiable (either clearly or more indistinctly) borrowings from other texts. Quotation from, citation of and reference to other texts are lucid examples, whereas the use of phrasing, style and metaphor originating in other texts may be more opaque, yet equally revealing.

The impact of intertextuality, where used as a technique for particular construction, representation and projection of preferred meanings, can be to support reinforce and legitimize the argument of the writer. Careful selection and editing of *borrowed* texts, and the utilization of other genres and discourses can achieve required evaluation, yet reference to other texts, directly through quotation or indirectly, retains projected links to *reality* and, hence, claims for the truth-value of the assertion. Key figures are often used as their status is used to imply a legitimising respectability and again support the claim to the truth content of the writer's assertions (c.f. the way academic writing uses quotation and citation of key research literature).

3. CONCLUSION

This paper advocates the critical engagement with texts, therefore also entails a critical engagement with the contexts of that text's production and reception, its audience and its purpose, as well possibilities for interpretation. The research also suggests an orientation to working with learners to demonstrate that ideologies are represented though contexts of cultures and these contexts of cultures are construed through registers, themselves ultimately realised by particular choices in language. These ideologies

themselves can therefore be unmasked by acts of analysis moving from the lexico-grammatical, though register and genre back to the ideologies that underpin the choices made at linguistic and extra-linguistic levels. Language analysis is then, by its nature, social, political and cultural analysis.

The value of a Critical Literacy Frame as an aid to personal deconstruction and *uncloaking* of texts and discourse as a reflective and reflexive act lies in its potential to enhance teachers' abilities to become more aware and, through interaction with others, develop their own notions of curriculum, so becoming more autonomous professionals. The challenge for education then is to create spaces and opportunities for reflection, that allow a continual interplay between thought and action, involving a commitment to achieving social justice though transformatory processes.

Within this paper, I have sought to focus on encouraging awareness of the ways in which systems of power affect people by the meanings they construct and represent. It has sought to investigate and elucidate how textual practices are social practices, taking place within social, historical, and political contexts. As Farahmandpur & McLaren (2001: 3) assert:

> Preparing students for critical citizenship through critical literacy deepens the roots of democracy by encouraging students to actively participate in public discourses and debates over social economic and political issues that affect everyday life in their own and neighbouring communities. In this way, students can acquire the civic courage and moral responsibility to participate in democratic life as critical social agents, becoming authors of their own history rather than being written off by history (Farahmandpur & McLaren, 2001: 3)

This paper represents one step along such a pathway to encouraging the critical decoding and analysis of powerful texts and discourses that can facilitate such critical social agency, and as such augment notions of critical pedagogy.

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